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**OPTIMISM
ACCORDING TO
ST. JOHN BAPTIST DE LA SALLE**

Brother Gabriel Emonnet

Philosophy views optimism as a tendency to consider everything as good, in the hope that there will be a satisfactory conclusion to every situation. This is also the sentiment of Saint John Baptist de La Salle.

"God will withdraw you from a trial in some unexpected manner, and when you least expect it." (M. 20, 3)

He expresses a hopeful attitude toward the future when he writes to a Brother stricken with an illness:

"Don't worry yourself about the future; leave it entirely to God, who will take care of you, for it is up to Him to do with you what He pleases." (Letters)

His optimism is characterised by a disposition of filial abandonment to our heavenly Father's Providence, in both the temporal and the spiritual spheres:

"Place yourself in God's arms and in those of His Mother, to be sustained not in a consoling and comforting manner, but as God wishes... God is always disposed to welcome you into his arms." (Letters).

With an assured finesse, he invites us to be confidently optimistic, based on faith:

"The more you abandon yourself to God with regard to temporal matters, the more God will take care to provide you with them. But if, on the contrary, you busy yourself with them, God will leave you to provide for yourself, and it may frequently happen that you will be left in want. Thus you will be punished for your lack of faith and confidence." (M. 67, 3)

Nevertheless, this optimism must not blithely rest on a passive security. With all his common sense, the holy Founder writes to Gabriel Drolin, on whom the future of the Institute in Rome depends:

"Carry out your work in school quietly without precipitous action. Don't seek an audience with His Holiness; you would ruin everything. Don't let slip the opportunities that come your way, but don't be overeager. I know it is better to live in more difficult circumstances, withdrawn from worldly concerns, and I am glad that you are in such dispositions. Still, when you decide to do this, you must put yourself entirely in the hands of Divine Providence, or, if you have not enough virtue for that nor enough faith, then you must take the necessary means before you carry out your plan. If you do neither, you are not acting as a Christian nor as an intelligent man." (Letters).

In our own times, we are shaken by apprehension over our personal future and that of the Congregation. This could result in an agonising and paralysing pessimism. Optimism, on the other hand, is a call to see with the eyes of faith:

"Have you then so little faith as to fear that if you occupy yourself exclusively with the establishment of God's domain in your heart and in the hearts of your pupils, you will be left in want of those things you need for food and clothing?" (M. 67, 2)

"Jesus Christ is careful to give sustenance to those who are completely devoted to His service." (M. 59, 2)

"Thus God ordinarily overturns the designs of men, and causes the contrary of what they had expected to happen, that they may learn to confide in Him and to abandon themselves entirely to His providence." (M. 23, 3)

In the saintly Founder's thought, optimism should in effect be an act of loving submission and confidence in the will of God:

"You may rest assured that God will take care of you, provided that you serve Him faithfully and omit nothing that He expects of you." (M. 59, 3)

According to De La Salle, optimism encourages us to accept in advance that everything is dictated by the One who guides us with Love and Wisdom. Canon Blain tells us that the Founder encouraged his disciples with these reflexions, not without some humour:

"Nothing happens in this world that God does not allow or ordain, and always with goodness and

wisdom. If we focus our desires on his good pleasure, we will assuage our trials and banish our anxieties. Even if we should have to die from hunger, he will rank us among the martyrs for our patience!" (Blain, III, 7)

Optimism also elevates the soul towards a superior ideal:

"You should aspire only for heaven, and constantly raise your heart and mind thither. You are made only for heaven, you should labour only for heaven, and you will find perfect rest only in heaven." (M. 40, 1)

Moreover, this ideal is God himself:

"Attach yourself to God alone, in Whom is all our happiness in this life and the next." (M. 35, 1)

Suffering is not an obstacle to the most joyful optimism when the latter is founded on the theological virtue of charity:

"One of the best means to acquire and preserve the divine love is to suffer much and to suffer with joy." (M. 95, 3)

Is it possible to suffer with joy? Rather say that black is white! Or can it be said that optimism finds a joyous side to suffering?

"Abandon yourself entirely to God in order to suffer the most deplorable trials in submission to

his holy Will, regarding them with desire, joy and thanksgiving as true blessings." (Collection)

In effect, Christianity is a synthesis of complementary virtues which reconcile opposite movements of the spirit: thus it is that the most exalted joy is the fruit of Christian suffering:

"If you possess the spirit of your state in life, God will see to it that you enjoy all sorts of consolations, even amongst your most painful trials." (M. 109, 2)

Nothing can disturb the kind of optimism that faith inspires:

"Yours will be true happiness if you rejoice in the midst of suffering and of the most painful trials." (M. 34, 2)

Finally, if you are in love, are you not happy to suffer for the One whom you love? This is why "the Apostles rejoiced in suffering for the name of Jesus" (Acts 5, 44). This passage suggested to the Founder the motive of optimism, which issues from the trial itself, no matter what its cause:

"The happiness of the just flows from the love of God which fills their heart. Hence, as this love has for its object an unchangeable and eternal good, it follows that those who possess it cannot be deprived of this delightful heritage so long as their soul remains united to God in charity." (M. 34, 3)

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